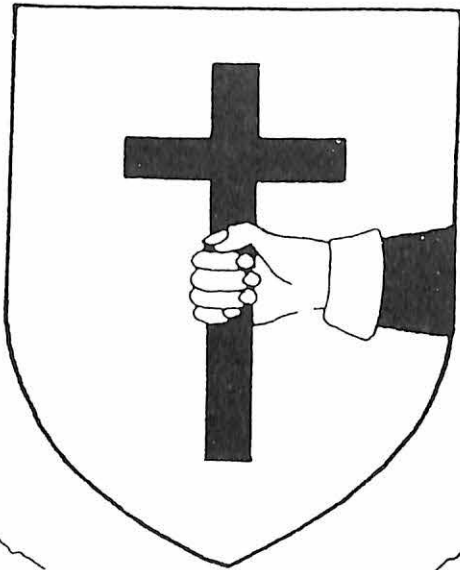


Ó Domhnaill Abú



*O'Donnell Clan
Newsletter No. 14
Summer 1990*



Sean O'Donnell and Mary Lavelle, both of Cleveland, Ohio, who made a special trip to Donegal to be wed in the land of O'Donnell are seen here being congratulated by Vincent O'Donnell (editor).

Eamonn deBurca, whose advert sometimes appears in ODA (he sells rare and antiquarian books, in particular those pertaining to Ireland and Irish history), has undertaken the mammoth task of reprinting the Annals of the Four Masters, the most authoritative source of Irish history and masterpiece on Irish antiquities which was compiled between 1632 and 1636 from all the available manuscript sources at that time. The Four Masters were, Br. Michael O'Clery, Chief of the Four Masters, assisted by Cucogry and Conary O'Clery, Peregrine O'Duigenan, Maurice and Fergus O'Maolconary. Although the aforementioned number more than four yet only four were involved at any given time.

The O'Clerys were historians to the O'Donnells and it is generally accepted that the Annals were compiled mainly in the Franciscan Convent of Donegal and due to the Flight of the Earls there was no O'Donnell to patronise the work so Br. Michael dedicated his masterpiece to Farrel O'Gara, Chief of Coolavin who assisted in every way possible to enable the completion of the work.

The importance of these Annals can best be described in the words of Br. Michael O'Clery: "For as you well know, my friends, evil days have come upon us and our country, and if this work is not done now, these old books(mss.) of ours that contain the history of our country, of its kings, and its warriors, its saints and its scholars may be lost to posterity."

These Annals were translated from the original manuscript by the noted Irish antiquarian, John O'Donovan, and what makes his edition most interesting is his invaluable footnotes on persons, places and events. This will be the first Irish reprint (there was a reprint done in the U.S.A. some years back) since O'Donovan's in 1856 and it is intended to retail at £285.00 if there is sufficient interest. The finished article will be bound in a Celtic designed green cloth, with sewn headbands and on fine paper. And, like previous editions, there will be seven volumes, five containing the text (original Gaelic on the left, English translation on right), footnotes, appendices, etc. while the other two volumes contain indices of persons and places. In my opinion no library is complete without the Annals of the Four Masters, so if you are interested then contact Eamonn at 27 Priory Drive, Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Tel.: 01-882159.

New members since last issue:

- D127 Leon O'Donnell, RMB 1562 Shepherds Drive, New Norfolk 7140, Tasmania, Australia.
 - D128 Sean O'Donnell, 15715 Fernway Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44111, U.S.A.
 - D129 Paddy O'Donnell, 1072 Kirtland Lane, Lakewood, Ohio 44107, U.S.A.
 - D130 Timothy O'Donnell, 610 Park Building, 140 Public Sq., Cleveland, Ohio 44114, U.S.A.
 - D132 Mary McSherry, 1010 Orchard Ridge Rd., Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48013, U.S.A.
 - D133 Dr. Roy C. O'Donnell, 1101 Riverside Drive, Watkinsville, GA. 30677, U.S.A.
 - D134 Dominic O'Donnell, 3 Wedgewood Close, Theydon Grove, Epping, Essex CM16 4QD, England.
 - D135 Frederick B. Walter, Flat 3, Albert Court, Prince Consort Rd., London SW7 2BE.
-

Count's visit

Count Gabriel O'Donnell visited his ancestral Donegal at the week-end as guest of long standing friends Vincent and Annette O'Donnell, Inver. The Count was accompanied by his wife and daughter Elizabeth who has been studying in Ireland since last September. During that time she stayed with well known RTE presenter Nuala Ni Domhnaill whose brother, Father Hugh O'Donnell, is head of the Clan.

Count Gabriel has visited Donegal on a number of occasions, the first being the opening of the Tostal in 1954. In 1984 he came over from Austria to honour the late Rupert Coughlan for the part he played in compiling a family lineage record of the Austrian side of the family. Last year he attended the O'Donnell clan rally at Doon, near Kilmacrennan.

The Countess and her daughter were very impressed with the scenery around Donegal and Elizabeth said she felt a decided affinity with the area. "The Castle and Old Abbey especially struck a nostalgic note". The family were later taken on a tour of the county by Vincent and Annette.



Count Gabriel(75) with his wife Ulrike and daughter Elizabeth in Donegal Castle during their visit last April.

Here is a synopsis of Micheline Kerney Walsh's talk on Red Hugh's mission to Spain as given by her at the Clan Gathering in June '89 .

Aodh Rua holds a very special place of affection in Ireland's historical memory. He had a short life; he was inaugurated chief of Tir Chonaill at the young age of nineteen and he died at the age of twenty-nine but he remains one of the outstanding and best loved figures of Irish history.

After the defeat of Kinsale in Jan. 1602 Red Hugh delegated all authority to his brother Rory(13) and sailed to Spain to plead with King Philip for more assistance. Indeed Spain, who was at war with England at the time and shared a common religion and ancestral background, was always favourable towards the Irish and it was to Spain we turned in our hour of need. Had the Spanish aid of 1601 been greater in number and had it landed in the north it surely would have been more effective. This, Red Hugh intended to point out to the King while requesting further aid. Red Hugh was accompanied by two Franciscans, Fr. Florence Conry and Fr. Maurice Dunleavy along with some other notable Irishmen. After a stormy journey they landed in northern Spain on 13th Jan. 1602.

Red Hugh immediately wished to visit the King but the latter was on a tour of the province of Leon and Hugh had to wait for his return. This new king, Philip III, unlike his father Philip II, was weak and ineffective. He delegated much of his power and authority to the ambitious and unscrupulous Duke of Lerma. Red Hugh was made very welcome by everyone in Spain and finally on 29th of Jan, the Council of State received and discussed the dispatches from Ireland concerning the defeat of Kinsale. Their immediate response was to sanction more aid, and so they submitted their recommendations to the King adding that he should hear the facts from O'Donnell himself.

Hugh was invited to court where he was well received by the King and his councillors, to whom he explained the purpose of his mission and requested military aid for Ireland. Again his request met with approval and the 20th March was set as the date by which the expedition should be ready.

O'Donnell, now satisfied that all was in order, went on a visit to his nephew, the fifteen year-old Henry, son of Hugh O'Neill and Siobhan (Red Hugh's

sister) who was studying at the University of Salamanca. This Henry later became colonel of the first Irish Regiment in Spanish service.

But meanwhile, Philip's ministers disagreed about the Irish mission, some maintaining that the King would be better advised in using such force directly against England. The force planned was 14,000 men in 67 ships to be assembled at Lisbon where the King himself intended to be present at their departure to give his good wishes and encouragement. This expedition would include some experienced Irish officers then serving in Flanders, along with money, medicines, hospital supplies, munitions, arms and all necessary equipment for the planned campaign.

But now the division of opinions among the ministers was a major factor in the eventual abortion of the expedition. The King now ordered that a "well-equipped ship under the command of a well-experienced and trustworthy person" should bear O'Donnell with 100,000 ducats and some munitions to Ireland, and there await the proposed expedition which would materialise later. Needless to say, these instructions caused great surprise and consternation to O'Donnell and his companions who objected strongly, pointing out their dismay at the change of plans and the futility of such a proposal. They immediately made their feelings known to the King and his council in letters.

The King in reply on 3rd of April ordered instead that the aforementioned ship should be sent immediately to Ireland to obtain further information regarding the strength of the English occupation there and in particular the ports, so as to decide where best to land an expedition. In the meantime O'Donnell was to be kept "in patience with good words which neither bind to any promise nor prevent any hope". On hearing this, O'Donnell wrote to Philip requesting at least 2,000 men with many munitions etc. to land at Killybegs and outlining a plan of campaign by which he promised with the help of the Irish they could "deliver half of all Ireland to the King". O'Donnell goes on to say that if 2,000 are not possible then 1,500 or even a mere 1,000 could clear "the enemy

from my lands and from those of the Earl O'Neill". But he warns that if the expedition sails later than June "it would find anything other than the blood and ashes of that multitude of faithful people who have placed their trust in your Majesty".

On the 7th of May the Council of State again considered O'Donnell's request and recommended to the King that a small army would not be advisable in view of the defeat already experienced at Kinsale. And so once again Philip began to assemble a force of some 14,000 men with all provisions under the command of Don Juan de Cardona. No doubt, King Philip was sincere in his desire for a successful expedition but the successful organisation of such a vast enterprise would have required the talents and constant application of a far more competent monarch than the well-meaning King Philip.

From his arrival in Spain Red Hugh was constantly receiving news from Ireland through Spaniards returning from Kinsale, merchants plying between both countries and other travellers. He was well aware of the ever-deteriorating state of the Irish, and with each report was prompted to renew or increase his pleas to the King. By June he was so consumed with anxiety and impatience that the Count of Caracena wrote on his behalf from La Coruna (where O'Donnell resided for most of his time in Spain) to Philip.

"Senor,

The extreme difficulties in which the Catholics of Ireland, and particularly Onil, must find themselves is the cause of great affliction to the Earl Odonel. Yet he says that he considers his own situation to be worse for, while they are losing their lives, he is absent from the war and is losing the honour and reputation of many years. He says that what he now wishes is only that Your Majesty should order immediately his departure for that kingdom in whatever way it may please Your Majesty for, although he has absolutely no doubt that Your Majesty will send them help, neither has he any doubt that any delay will result in the loss of his lands and the death or desertion to the enemy of his followers....."

The King replied by requesting the latest news from Ireland and promising Caracena of his continued attention to the planned expedition. As June and July passed more bad news arrived from Ireland. By the end of July the King

informed Caracena that it had not been possible so far this year to assemble enough ships at La Coruna for such an expedition and indeed the ships already there were needed elsewhere. So remembering how the Spanish Armada of 1588 suffered from the autumnal storms it would be unwise to go ahead with the expedition until spring of the following year.

On hearing this Red Hugh immediately pressed for an audience with the King. By mid August he was in Simancas where the King resided. On the 22nd of that month he had still not been admitted to the King when his last illness was upon him. According to Ludhaigh O Cleirigh, his biographer, he was sick for sixteen days dying on the 10th of Sept. Three days earlier Red Hugh had made a will. On attempting to sign it he only got as far as Aodh O before the quill fell from his hand, yet his final wish in that will was for the King "to send money and some troops to Ireland to the Earl O'Neill and to my brother before the news of my death should arrive over there, otherwise, when it becomes known, they will be lost, for all will hasten to make peace with the English, because all their hopes depended on the help which I was to bring to them. So that their courage be rekindled, letters from His Majesty, and the money, should reach them before the news of my death....."

O'Donnell asked to be buried in the church of St. Francis in Valladolid and this was done. Ludhaigh O Cleirigh describes his burial: "His body was taken to Valladolid, to the King's Court, in a four-wheeled hearse, with great numbers of State Officers, of the Council, and of the royal guard all round it, with blazing torches and bright flambeaux of beautiful waxlights blazing all round on each side of it. He was buried after that in the chapter of the monastery of St. Francis with great honour and respect and in the most solemn manner any Gael ever before had been interred....."

'O Domhnaill Abu' is published by V.O'Donnell, Inver, Co. Donegal, Eire. Tel.:073-36059.

Subscription rates for 4 issues:
Ireland and Britain(rolled)....£6
Ireland and Britain(envelope)..£7
Other countries(rolled).....£7
Other countries(envelope).....£8

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Hugh O'Donnell, titular Earl of Tirconnell, 1608-42.

By Fr. Canice Mooney, O.F.M.

(This article appeared in the Donegal Annual of 1953/4.)

This Hugh O'Donnell was the son of Rory, the first Earl, and of Briget Fitzgerald, his wife, who was daughter of the Earl of Kildare. He was less than a year old at the time of the Flight of the Earls, and since his mother, partly for personal reasons (she was expecting the birth of another baby) and partly perhaps, for diplomatic and political reasons (in an attempt to salvage some of the lands and rights forfeited by Rory's flight), did not follow her husband into exile, the baby remained in charge of two Irish wetnurses. When the Earls set out from Louvain on their journey to Rome in February, 1608, the infant was placed in charge of Anne Madden, wife of Denis Kelly, who had replaced Sheila, wife of Hugh Gallagher, as his nurse and fostermother. At the request of the Archduke Albert, the party was given quarters in the convent of the Augustinian Canonesses, known as the White Ladies. Rory O'Donnell before departing had given Colonel Henry O'Neill and Father Donagh Mooney, O.F.M., guardian of St. Anthony's College, Louvain, a general right of supervision over his son.

In October, 1610, Hugh, with his three young companions, Sean and Brian O'Neill (sons of the Earl of Tyrone by his third wife, Catherine Magennis) and a namesake (his own first cousin, the son of Cathbarr) were removed on the orders of the Archduke to the Irish Franciscan College of St. Antony, where they were placed under the jurisdiction of Fr. Aodh MacAingil, O.F.M., and their education continued. In October, 1621, Hugh enrolled as a student at the University; a few years later we find him in attendance at the court at Brussels; and before the end of 1625 he had entered on the military career which was to occupy him until his death in action sixteen years later.

King Philip IV of Spain and the Archduchess Isabela Clara at Brussels continued towards him the benign favour of their predecessors, by grants and pensions, commissions in the army, and titles of honour. In January, 1632, he was made Maestro de Campo of an Irish regiment like his friend and rival John O'Neill, titular Earl of Tyrone, and the eyes of all patriotic exiles were turned towards those two scions of the princely houses of O'Neill and O'Donnell to lead them back some day to free Ireland once

and for all from her ancient enemy.

In order to ensure a lasting friendship between them for the common good, Archbishop Florence Conry, O.F.M., had proposed a marriage between Sean and the famous Lady Mary Stuart O'Donnell, sister of Hugh, who had been born in Ireland shortly after the flight of Rory, and who, allegedly, to escape marrying a protestant, had fled to Flanders from England about March, 1626, disguised in man's clothing. Nothing came of the proposal, and the eve of the rebellion of 1641 found wise counsellors of the king of Spain advising that both of these men should not be sent to Ireland together, as their mutual jealousy might wreck the undertaking. Fate took a hand in the game and neither one nor the other but a greater than both, the dauntless Eoghan Rua O'Neill, was destined to become the leader of the Ulster army of the Confederation. John died in Catalonia in Spain, 27th January, 1641, and Hugh was killed in action in the summer of the following year during a naval engagement against the French in the Mediterranean.

For three centuries the O'Clerys had proved themselves faithful and efficient chroniclers to the O'Donnells. When the sad news of the death of Hugh reached St. Antony's, Louvain, Brother Michael O'Clery, O.F.M., lamenting the death of his hereditary chieftain, sat down and penned his obituary notice on one of his manuscripts, which is now preserved in the Royal Library at Brussels. As far as I am aware, this is the first occasion on which it has been published.

'Aois Criost, 1642. O Domhnaill da ngoirthi Iarla Thire Chonail, i. Aodh mac Ruadhraighe mhic Aodha mhic Maghnasa I Domhnaill do bhadhadh a Samhradh na bliadhna so ar an muir da ngoirthir Mari Mediterraneo ag cuidiughadh le Ri na Spainne isin ccogadh tarla idir e fein agus Ri Frange, 7c. A mi October na bliadhna roimh an bliadhain si mar ata 1641, do thionnsgainsiod senGhaidhil agus senGhoillaidh d'urmhor coimheirghe chogaidh in aghaidh na n-eitricedh in Erinn, da saoradh o gach broid da raibhe orra.

Mar do-chualaidh an t-iarla O Domhnaill adubhranur an coimheirghe cogaidh sin do bheith in Erinn do-chuaidh do lathair ri na Spainne agus do mhaidh a sheirbhis fein agus bas I Neill roimhe sin air

agus gach obliogaid da raibhe ar righ na
Spainne fa chuidiughadh le
hEireannchoibh, agus da bhrigh sin do
iarr a ched le congnamh dfaghail, no gan
a fhaghail, agus a leigen da dhuthaigh.
Agus as amhlaigh do-conncas don righ
agus da chomhairle gan a leigen go
hEirinn acht a chuir ar cogadh na
fairrge do chathughadh re
Frangcachaibh."

.....
English Translation:

A.D.1642. O'Donnell, who was called Earl of Tirconnel, that is, Hugh son of Rory son of Hugh son of Manus O'Donnell, was drowned in the summer of this year in the sea called the Mediterranean Sea helping the king of Spain in the war that occurred between himself and the king of France, etc. It was in the month of October of the previous year, namely in 1641, that the Old Irish and the Old English of Ireland in general began an insurrection and war against the heretics in Ireland to free themselves from every disability under which they laboured.

When the Earl O'Donnell, whom we have mentioned, heard about this insurrection and war in Ireland, he went to the king of Spain and referred to his own service and the death of O'Neill before that and the many obligations under which the king of Spain was to help the Irish. For those reasons, he besought his permission to secure aid and return to his country, or even to go without aid. But the king and his council decided not to let him go to Ireland, but sent him to war at sea to fight against the French.

.....
Reading between the lines, one can discern Brother Micheal O'Clery's enthusiastic support for the rising of 1641, his joy at the union of Old Irish and Old English in the common cause, a slight regret that not an O'Donnell but an O'Neill would now lead the forces of his native province, and a hint of the old native pride in his way of saying that O'Donnell was helping the king of Spain and not merely serving under him. Notable too is the ready acceptance of the English title of earl side by side with reference to O Domhnaill, The O'Donnell.

Obituary.

It was with deep regret we received the news of the death of Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. He had been a subscriber to 'O Domhnaill Abu' and had on several occasions helped with articles. A synoptic version of his wonderful lecture 'To Rome by Boat, Coach and Horseback' delivered at Rathmullan in Sept '88 was published in Newsletter No. 11 and the full text appeared in the 1989 Donegal Annual. A keen historian, he left several important and scholarly works, e.g. 'Imeacht na nIarlai' (Flight of the Earls), 'Gaelscrinte san Eoraip' etc. along with his many lectures and articles.

Ar dheislaimh De go raibh a anam uasal!

.....
Tough Times, Tough Men.

A new subscriber, Leon O'Donnell from Tasmania, sent me, along with other information, the following:....."In the early part of this century my grandfather Edward O'Donnell, along with his brother, Bill and their father, James, supplemented their small farm income with a contract with the railway to supply 'squared sleepers', these are the timber 'ties' the rail lines rest on. Things were obviously very tight in this period and there were plenty of people ready to take your contract if you slackened and did not provide the daily quota of 'sleepers'. They were felling a tree in the bush from which to cut their 'sleepers' when a limb of the tree dislodged and fell onto James breaking both of his legs. There was no rush to get him to the doctor as it was early in the day and the quota needed to be met. James was placed in the shade while Pop and uncle Bill finished felling the tree, sawed it into sleeper lengths, split and squared the 'sleepers'. The 'sleepers' were then stacked onto the horse and cart, James lifted on top of the 'sleepers', then the two hour trip down the track out of the bush to the rail head, in the township of Bridgewater, where the doctor finally attended to my great grandfather James. Then the return two hours journey home. James spent his period of incapacity sharpening the axes, adzes and saws. Tough times they obviously were but the pioneers coped to secure their small properties and support their families. James died in 1932 at the age of 85."

£100,000 castle restoration

By Annette O'Donnell

Over £100,000 is to be spent on the restoration of Donegal Castle in the coming year, it was announced last week.

The Castle is one of several National monuments to benefit from a grant pool of £25 million allocated by the European Regional Development Fund. Sixty tourism projects are to benefit involving a total investment of £55 million approved by the Office of Public Works, Bord Fáilte and SFADCo.

A spokesman for the Office of Public Works said this week that they expected to begin work on Donegal Castle within the year.

Major structural improvements are planned, beginning with the restoration of a major section of the medieval roof. As the castle is one of the few medieval structures in the

country the work will be copied from designs from that period.

The spokesman said the roof work was essential 'if a large ornate fireplace in the castle is to be preserved. At present rain is coming through the roof onto the fireplace.'

The sandstone structure is again in the medieval mould and the Board are aiming to preserve the intricate carved stone.

Glazing will also be installed in a huge bare window frame in the room.

Tourist information at the castle is also to be upgraded — with a change in the present displays and an upgrading of interpretive facilities.

The OPW spokesman said they saw Donegal Castle as 'a gateway to Glenveagh' and for this reason they hope to do as much work as possible to upgrade the building. 'We are delighted we now have this facility to do so,' he said.

Restoration work is to take at least 12 months.

From Donegal Democrat.

Donncha's March To Kinsale

*"O'er many a river bridged with ice,
through many a vale with snowdrifts dumb
past quaking fen and precipice
the Prices of the North have come...."*

The poem commemorates Red Hugh O'Donnell's forced winter March 389 years ago to Kinsale to relieve the forces of Don Juan Del Aquilla who were besieged by the Lord Deputy, Lord Charles Mountjoy. The Spanish forces should really have landed in Ulster to help sustain the momentum of the 9 years war. The O'Donnell march in the depth of winter was admired even by their mortal enemies, the English, with Sir George Carew saying, "It was the greatest march with baggage that has been heard of". However, victory was not to be theirs, and in their defeat at Kinsale (a battle lasting only 3 hours) Ireland's fate was decided: a distinctive way of life, customs, laws, culture and family upbringing disappeared for ever. After Kinsale Red Hugh went to Spain for help but died there on 10th September 1602. Five years later Hugh O'Neill and Rory O'Donnell (brother of Red Hugh) together with 100 members of the leading Irish Families in Ulster left Ireland for ever in what was called 'The Flight of The Earls'. Within a few years the Plantation of Ulster had taken place, and Ireland is still suffering from the effects of this.

On Sunday the 8th April 1990 a much different band set forth to March from Donegal to Kinsale. In pleasant morning sunshine Donncha O'Dualaigh with his intrepid warriors and comely maidens assembled under the shadow of Donegal Castle (securely locked up

not by the enemy now but our very own Board of Works in Dublin (the Centre of the Universe), not even to be opened for this special occasion). Vincent O'Donnell piped, Sean O'Siochain (former Director General of the G.A.A. and Patrick Campbell, noted Donegal man did their little bits to see them off and the collectors with their buckets moved into position because this was not just a walk for the crack. The 350 miles to be travelled was for a much different battle than Red Hugh's — it was to collect money for the fight against Multiple Sclerosis by the M.S. Society of Ireland. M.S. is a disease which affects the brain and central nervous system. It is not contagious. It is not a mental illness. It cannot be prevented because its cause is unknown. It cannot be cured, but it can be managed. The Society provides support for sufferers and their families; a network of community workers; a telephone helpline service; professional counsellors and funds for research to find the cause and so a cure for M.S. With the legendary great hearts of the people of Ireland in contributing to such causes (Donncha's troops collected over £300 around the local pubs on the eve of their March) there is no doubt about the outcome of this March to Kinsale — the winners this time will be the M.S. Society of Ireland and ultimately those in our country suffering from this disease.

From Donegal Times May '90.

Grant of Arms for noted historian's family

The Chief Herald of Ireland, Mr. Donal Begley, recently presented Mr. Liam Coughlan with a family Grant of Arms at the National Heraldic Museum, Kildare Street, Dublin.

The Grant of Arms was awarded as a tribute to the historical research carried out by Mr. Coughlan's late father, Mr. Rupert J. Coughlan, a former senior civil servant, who was also a noted historian, author and genealogist.

The late Mr. Coughlan's research centred mainly on the O'Donnell clan not only in Ireland but also abroad — his widow, Roisin, is an O'Donnell from Lower Rosses, Co. Donegal. He was an authority on the history and genealogy of the O'Donnells.

His research traced and documented the history of the O'Donnell clan in Ireland and his genealogy of the O'Donnell chieftains, dating from the 14th century to the present day, is on display in the National Heraldic Museum. He traced the origins of the O'Donnells in Austria and Spain from the time of the Flight of the Earls to the present day. This has culminated in the renewal of friendship and ties

between the present heads of the clan in Austria, Count Gabriel O'Donnell, and Spain, Hugh O'Donnell, Duke of Tetuan, with Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, the current head of the clan in Ireland.

Born in Youghal, Co. Cork, in 1907, the late Mr. Coughlan was a founder member and past president of the Co. Donegal Historical Society, a former honorary secretary of the Military History Society of Ireland and a noted contributor to many historical journals. In addition, his biography of Napper Tandy is probably the most scholarly work on this famous Irishman.

Mr. Coughlan died in 1986. He is survived by his wife, Roisin (nee O'Donnell), and his five children, Mrs. Roisin O'Doherty, Mr. Liam Coughlan, chief executive, Irish Steel; Mr. Malachy Coughlan, consultant gynaecologist; Mr. Ernan Coughlan, chartered surveyor, and Mrs. Eileen Bannan.

The late Mr. Coughlan was also interested in the genealogy of his own and his wife's families. His research enabled him to trace ten generations of each family on both the male and the female sides going back to the early 17th century.

From Donegal Democrat 6th July '90.



Photo: Connor Sinclair.

Burke inaugurated by O'Donnell.

The Royal Rath of Ruaskeera near Kilmaine, Co. Mayo, was the place of inauguration of the Chieftains of the Mayo Burkes known as MacWilliam Iochtar. The last chief of the name to be elected here was Theobald, the illegitimate son of Walter Ciotach Bourke, in 1595. He was not the most senior of the line but he had the support of Red Hugh O'Donnell and this ensured his election. Present at this gathering were most of the chieftains of the West, but also present were 1,800 men from Tirconnell who formed the first circle around the rath, next to them were the O'Dohertys of Inishowen and behind these were Clan MacSweeney Gallowglas. Outside again were the Bourkes and their neighbouring Clans.

"They came the tall O'Dohertys from Swilly's rugged shore,
O'Clerys from Kilbarron's woods where hoarse the waters roar
O'er Assaroe, MacSweeney's towering glensmen brave and stern
And many another clan from Inishowen to Erne."

This, it is said, was the last official inauguration in Ireland under the old Gaelic system and it says a lot for the power of the twenty-two year old Red Hugh who had so much control over Connaught that he could dictate to the Burkes who their leader should be and personally inaugurate him on the Royal Rath of Ruaskeera.

The 29th of June 1990 saw the next Burke inaugurated on that same spot. In the middle of a westerly gale and a downpour of rain a large group of Burkes and friends made their way to the same rath (gaelic for ring-fort) where their chieftain-elect took his place upon the inauguration stone, repeated the sacred oath which was read aloud by the local priest and then received the 'Slat Bhan' (a white willow wand, the symbol of office) from Vincent O'Donnell, Inver, Co. Donegal who reminded him that he was to govern his Clan in a manner as pure and as straight as that same wand. This done, the newly-elected Chieftain, Mr. Richard Burke, (one time Fine Gael Minister for Education and twice E.C. Commissioner) stepped down from the stone, turned three times round in honour of the Holy Trinity and to show himself to his people while they chanted "Hail MacWilliam".

On arrival back in the town-hall of Kilmaine the same scene was re-enacted for the benefit of those who didn't brave the elements to be present on the rath, only this time Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill(64a) was present to hand over the 'Slat Bhan' having missed the earlier event due to a slight road accident from which she escaped, thankfully, unharmed.

..... V.O'Donnell.....

